

THE
PLACE OF SCRIPTURE
IN THE CHURCH
IN ANCIENT AND MODERN TIMES

BY
THOMAS B. STRONG

DEAN OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD

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NOTE

THE following lectures were delivered in substance at Croydon during the month of September, 1916. They are printed very much as they were read. Owing to pressure of time some considerable omissions had to be made, so that not all that is printed was actually read. I have also endeavoured to clear up obscurities and in a few places I have expanded what I had written for delivery. It is not claimed that the whole question of the use of the Bible is fully discussed in these pages: it is hoped that attention may be drawn in them to some points which appear to be overlooked in the present day.

I

IT is impossible, I think, for anyone who looks round at the various streams of tendency in the religious world to-day, to deny that the English mind in its dealing with this subject has a deficient sense of truth, and of the responsibility for truth. This is in part the religious form of our general and profound distrust of precise and technical knowledge which appears in all regions of our life, and has cost us so much in life and treasure during this war. The desire to know exactly what is true, to seek truth for its own sake, and to submit our freedom of conjecture and sentiment to its dominion are distasteful processes. It is now a matter of common knowledge and comment that we have failed in these respects to a disastrous extent in the matter of natural science. We have satisfied ourselves with obsolete and inefficient practical methods, because we have lacked enterprise and the instinct for enquiry on the theoretical side.

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And we are all clear by now that we have made a bad mistake.

It might be anticipated that this disposition would display itself in the religious sphere, where the whole question of truth is more complicated, and the existence of age-long controversies has added to the confusion. But there is an additional reason for the present state of things in religion. A source of religious authority, widely revered and trusted, has itself come into discussion and criticism. When the authority of the Roman Church broke down over a large part of Europe, it seemed as if the anarchy in religious opinion which was likely to result from this would be averted by means of an appeal to Holy Scripture. The hope was very imperfectly fulfilled, as it proved impossible to obtain universal consent to any one interpretation of Scripture. On the other hand, the danger of anarchy was not realized to its full extent. In spite of some unreasonable and anarchical developments, opinion tended to adopt certain fixed lines of division, corresponding to ecclesiastical groupings, which have persisted to the present day. But the interpretation of Scripture has always seemed

to be a hopeful avenue to agreement: by continual study and comparison of views it ought to be possible to approximate to unanimity. This position depended largely upon a particular view of Scripture. It was regarded in practice as a homogeneous whole. A statement was as valid and as final in one book as in another; inspiration governed the whole, and it was sacrilegious to raise questions. But now, the whole position of Holy Scripture is in debate; and this fact adds force to the tendency, already sufficiently strong, to regard with suspicion any attempt at deriving positive authoritative truth from the Bible, or imposing limits on the freedom of speculation and sentiment.

At the present time we are called upon to think penitently of the deficiencies of our religious life, and it has appeared to me that one of the most important is this matter of the deficient sense of truth. No Church can possibly claim the allegiance of men or expect to save them out of their normal lukewarm interest in religion unless it has some positive message for their souls. The question whether our Church of England to-day has any such adequate message is bound up with

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the question of the importance to be assigned to the Bible. I wish, therefore, to consider somewhat carefully some of the views that have been held of the Bible, and the effect upon our use of it of modern knowledge.

Before attacking this subject it will be desirable first to say a few words on the subject of the natural powers of man in the region of religion. What are the powers with which man can approach religious questions, and what are their defects? Roughly speaking, we may say that there are three powers which it is necessary to take into account, the intellect, the conscience, and the emotions.¹ All these contribute something to our view of the world, and help us to play our part in it. It is, therefore, of the greatest importance that we should not underrate their power, or question their validity in their own range.

When we survey the world from the point of view of the intellect, we endeavour to learn from it what is actually there, and how it is ordered. For this purpose, we treat the

¹ It is not meant by this that they are three separate faculties, in the old sense, sharply and finally divided from one another; the question of the manner and degree of their difference is not here considered, and the words are used in a popular sense for three distinct and characteristic aspects of mental activity.

world as a system of "facts," or "events," or "phenomena." We find it there, as we say, "outside us," and we have to live in contact with it. We go to work with the belief that what happens at one moment is connected with something that has gone before, and that things do not occur at haphazard. This conviction is only gradually realized and worked out, but it really governs, unconsciously at first, and then consciously, all our mental efforts. If we were driven to hold that there is no trustworthy order in what happens, we should know that our intellect had failed. On the other hand, if we could completely eliminate all uncertainty, and acquire the power of accurate prevision throughout the world of nature, we should know that the intellect had completely succeeded. We aim at knowing what we may count on,—what we may expect to happen, and so, at the power of using the world for our own purposes. This is the ordinary use of the mind which gives rise to science and invention and philosophy, as well as to material progress.

Even within its own limits this point of view is not without a connexion with the

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religious world. For the mind has, as implied above, its ideal. It hopes perpetually to read the whole riddle of the world, and to have such a conception of it that all its variety and complexity may fall into a complete and coherent system. But this means, as it were, going outside the world of direct observation. Besides being systematic and coherent within, it must as a whole be susceptible of explanation: it must have a cause and a purpose. The idea of God is a way of supplying this need. As a First Cause, as a Ruler moving towards some distant purpose, the existence of God has seemed to some thinkers to be a necessary postulate to the order of the world: and the so-called Proofs of the Existence of God are the philosophical attempt at a justification of this point of view. But these "proofs," and indeed this point of view, unless it is aided and supplemented from elsewhere, cannot produce certainty in regard even to the existence of God. The world, as we know it, reaches us through our senses. We select and reflect upon the impressions upon our senses, and we rise to higher and higher levels of abstraction, till, in the mind of great men of science, their

conception of the world is wholly unlike anything we can see or hear or touch. But, however complicated and abstract our treatment of it may be, our intercourse with it begins in the deliverances of sense and uses them as the material of its operations. The idea of God is not merely another force in the world, like electricity or gravity: it asserts the existence of a Person, Who transcends the whole material order; that is, the idea of God takes us outside the material order, while all the laws and uniformities by which we endeavour to systematize our experience, leave us within it. As a matter of history, the conviction of God's presence and activity comes from a different region of our psychological constitution, and on different evidence: it does not appear first or exclusively as a part of the explanation of nature. But the intellect endeavours to place this conviction in systematic connexion with our originally sensuous experiences, and conceives it, as already noticed, under the form of Cause or Purpose. Yet our experience *inside* the order of nature does not, by itself, enable us to argue validly to a cause *outside*. And the Cause or Purpose is not,

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strictly speaking, necessary to enable us to deal successfully with the world: we could carry on all our observations without necessarily asking how the world we observe came into existence, or what purpose it may be supposed to serve. There is the strongest impulse to round off our view of the world by the assumption of a First Cause, and a final Purpose: *i.e.* to form a picture of it on the analogy of our own action: but there is a taint of inconclusiveness about the arguments which profess to take us outside the order which we know through the senses. Thus, the scientific co-ordinating intellect, though it has a real connexion with and interest in the religious sphere, does not supply us with a conclusive approach thereto. It deals with a part or aspect only of all our experience, and creates an ideal which it does not fulfil.

This, however, is not the only connexion between the intellect and religion: it has also the function of criticism. Religion, as has just been said, draws from other sources than that of the pure observing and co-ordinating processes of the mind, and it not infrequently happens that a conflict arises between the ideas derived respectively from

the different sources. In such a case, the intellect claims the right of criticism. It claims to examine and reject religious ideas which are incompatible with results obtained in the ordinary exercise of reason upon the world. In this world it feels at home: it trusts and constantly verifies its interpretations of the world; and is prepared to reject what contravenes them. There is no doubt that it is justified in pursuing this course. But even here there is peril. We have already noticed that this particular attitude towards the world has one important limit: it cannot give us secure access outside the range of the experiences upon which all its operations are based. In like manner it cannot be quite sure that the material upon which it works and the methods it employs are quite adequate to all existence and reality. Its criticisms may be based on imperfect data; there may be room for fundamental modifications in some of its most trusted conclusions. And the probability of this increases as we draw near the edge, if we may so say, of the area of ordinary experience. The scientific intellect is, strictly speaking, travelling outside its true range, if it asserts as a necessary

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inference from its observations that God exists: it is not less truly an extravagance, if it is maintained that God, assuming Him to exist, can only act in accordance with the laws and uniformities attained by observation and reflection. Thus the function of criticism as well as the function of construction, lacks absolute conclusiveness.

Something of the same sort must be said about the conscience. There is a way of looking at the world which is characteristic of the conscience, somewhat like that which we have associated with the mind or intellect. But there is rather an important difference. The main aim of the intellect, as we have described it, is to know what actually is and happens; the conscience is not contented with what simply is, it contrasts this with what ought to be. It claims the right to approve or disapprove the actions of individual men in the first place, and then the whole plan or order of the world, as it appears to be. It can say of the action of an individual, This is good, or This ought not to be; and it may conceive of the world as subject to a similar judgment; it may say of it, If the world were properly ordered this ought

never to have happened in it. Moreover, it will turn its principles of judgment upon what may be current beliefs about God, and will claim that these, too, should satisfy it. Conscience may test and reject affirmations about God which seemed reasonable enough to an earlier age; it was conscience which revolted in Greece against the stories of the gods of Olympus: the conscience of man would have been clearly on the wrong track if the gods were merely as men without men's restraints. What happened in Greece in the fifth century B.C. is always likely to happen again. Any way of representing the relation of God to the world and His principles of government is a challenge to the conscience of man: he always claims the right to satisfy his conscience about anything which he is expected to believe about God.

It is quite right, as well as inevitable, that the conscience should exercise this function of criticism: it is, however, of considerable importance to remember that the conscience is not infallible. It is capable of advance and of retrogression and of misdirection. It may advance beyond the stage at which it views certain things favourably or without

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repulsion, as in the case cited from the history of Greek thought just now. On the other hand, it may lose vividness and sensitiveness of perception, as happens not infrequently in the history of individuals. And it may attach critical importance to the wrong things altogether, or give a wholly exaggerated weight to things right in themselves, but of no particular value: the history of fanaticism supplies us with plenty of instances of this. Conscience has its functions in the definition and criticism of religious belief: but it is not an absolute and final authority. Its deliverances require to be tested and verified, whether they are the deliverances of individuals or of groups of individuals.

We need not delay long upon the consideration of the work of the emotions in religion. There is no doubt that they have their place. A merely intellectual view of the world and human life, or even a merely ethical view, would be cold and inhuman. No religion that failed to stir the emotions would have any wide appeal; it is natural that they should be profoundly stirred by it. But there is no human power which is less trustworthy than emotion if it is allowed to

govern ; that is, to determine what is right and wrong in religion. A strong emotional attraction or repulsion may indicate that a particular religious conviction is likely to be true or the reverse, but it may also indicate an unregulated state of feeling and conscience. And there is nothing within the purview of the emotions to show which it is.

All these—the intellect, the conscience, and the feelings—are modes in which the personality of man reacts upon the world around him. They all have a very important place in his life, and in his religious belief. But they are all open to a serious criticism ; they are none of them infallible. In connexion with our ordinary work in the world this does not, perhaps, matter very much : there are well-known and effective methods of correcting and advancing them. The experience of life in any developing society tends slowly, perhaps, but on the whole steadily, to eliminate false ideas and imperfect moral standards : it is in this way that man progresses : but the process is curiously uneven and slow. Over this ground man is within the limits of his powers, and may conceivably develop without raising any

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questions which take him outside these limits. There will be differences of opinion amongst men upon a variety of points : however true it may be that truth is one, and that men who think and will and feel rightly might be expected to agree, yet it does not happen in fact that men do all agree. Such agreement is not necessary, and the absence of it is not disturbing. The whole field of discussion is fairly clear, and men are at home in it and know their way about it. But this is not true when we come to religion. The existence of God, and still more all definite statements or beliefs about God take us outside the limits of the experience upon which the mind ordinarily works. We understand and make allowance for the ordinary divergences and errors that arise in ordinary life ; and they do not, for the ordinary man, arouse any suspicion that his powers may be radically incompetent to their task. But it is different with the subject of religion. No one who surveys the field of religious opinion as it exists now and has existed in history can fail to be startled at the great conflict of voices which he finds. He can understand that some of the opinions that have been

quite confidently held belong to an early and ill-informed state of the mind or the conscience: he can see that these were never really true, and he can understand their disappearance, as he can understand the disappearance of childish ideas about the physical world. But the conflict in religion goes farther than this. If we eliminate all opinions that we may reasonably call absurd or of merely local importance and try to reach some body of truth upon which all must agree, we shall find, as the Deists found in the eighteenth century, that there is very little upon which there is any widespread agreement. It follows that in religion certain questions are raised which, though applicable to our ordinary experience, are less disturbing there. We are accustomed to find ourselves unable to form any final theory even of all the phenomena which belong to daily experience: philosophers have been searching for centuries for such a theory, but none has been attained though many have been announced. This is unfortunate, perhaps: but, in a sense, it does not much matter. Even if our speculative power should prove inadequate for a final and comprehensive

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interpretation of the world it will not seriously affect our procedure in it. We may go further. If we should succeed in persuading ourselves that our ideas of the world around us, our perceptions and the like, are all untrustworthy, even this would not make much practical difference. We all have to live in the world as if our ordinary notions of it were true: I may doubt whether I exist, or you exist, or whether food will nourish and fire burn me, but I have to live as if all these dubious propositions were certainly true in the plainest and least sophisticated sense. We are content to leave doubts of this kind to persons who are interested in them, and are prepared to give time and labour to the effort at solving them. But it is different with religion. The conflict of opinion, and the suspicion of the competence of our faculties are much more serious. We want to know whether any of the various opinions are true, and, if any, then which? We want to know whether we are capable of finding our own way to God, and whether He can and does come to meet us on our road. Our daily experience in the world does not provide a rough practical

corrective of our theoretical doubts : we know that men not only can and do deny in theory the existence of God, but also ignore Him in practice. For my own part, I think there is no answer to these difficulties, in this shape and in this connexion. I do not mean by this that the powers implanted in us are incompetent to reach religious truth : I mean that they are limited and fallible, and that speculation alone will not tell us where their limits are, or why and in what degree they are fallible. We want in religion to be introduced into the true religious environment, so that we can find a valid test of our ideas. In ordinary matters, as I have said, we find this corrective of speculative difficulties almost without knowing it. If we cannot *prove* the truth of our perceptions and ideas we have to behave as if they were true : and this is true of all our ordinary experience. We are active in it, we form ideas and imaginations and hypotheses, and we are constantly being forced to correct and modify them by contact with what we call the outer world. This contact with a world or a being which for convenience and for the present we will call external to us is what we want in religion.

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If there were a world of religious experience and intercourse with which we could get into connexion then we should know to some extent where we are. We should be able to neglect or to estimate at their proper value our sceptical questionings, if we could be sure that our limitations were overcome, and our imaginations corrected by contact with some reality that would control us as the world controls our thoughts. This brings us back to the consideration of the Bible, for it is just this which the Bible is traditionally expected to do. It is claimed for it that it puts us in contact with a religious environment or atmosphere; it supplies tests by which we can estimate the value of our own ideas and doubts: it guides and controls the exercise of our intellect and conscience and feeling upon the material of religion. And the question now is, Can we still claim all this for it?

Let us first recall to our minds what the Bible is, and begin with the Old Testament. This, in spite of all the various hands and the long years that have gone to its production, may be said to be a book of one idea. It describes the origin and progress—the

very chequered progress—of the intercourse between God and one particular nation. There are other things in it besides this: but they are there because of their relation to this one ruling idea. There is, as has often been remarked, little or no speculation on the questions of philosophy in it. Such intercourse as God is said to hold with His people has for its scene the ordinary world in which we live: the world, in which men eat and drink, marry and give in marriage. If the Jewish people are to know God at all, they will do it in the ordinary world, and in the ordinary sort of history which befalls nations. That is the main drift of the Old Testament as it stands.

Taking this as our starting-point, we must then proceed to notice certain highly important facts bearing on this general purpose. First, as to the method of this intercourse. The initiative is always represented as coming from God. God reveals Himself to men according to a regular plan. He speaks to specially chosen individuals, such as Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, and through these He conveys His message to mankind. That this is the way in which men come to

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know God, according to the teaching of the Bible, is not so much a conclusion from investigation as the main assumption. It is assumed throughout that man's knowledge of God is limited by his capacity to know and understand, and by the degrees of clearness with which God chooses to speak. The knowledge of the Name of the Lord conveyed to Abraham is different from that conveyed to Moses, and less extensive. The prophets speak when the Word of the Lord comes to them, and deliver their message as they have received it. There is the sharpest condemnation for the false prophet, to whom no message has been given, and for the prophet who neglects or varies the message entrusted to him.

Secondly, the intercourse of God with man, starting with God Himself, is conveyed to men through chosen individuals. These persons have their position as prophets not for themselves alone: a prophet or other messenger of God is the intermediary between God and mankind or the chosen people. Abraham is called, and a revelation of the Name of the Lord given to him; but his position of privilege contains the promise that

all the families of the earth shall be blessed through him.¹ Moses is called and inspired in order that he may make a nation of the Jews and bind them in the covenant-relation to God. One after another the prophets are sent to warn and teach and persuade the recalcitrant people. Their message deals with the nation, with its sins and its hopes: God claims the obedience and devotion of the nation, and its failure to respond involves it in disaster—a disaster which the prophet has to share.

Thirdly. The fundamental element in the content of the revelation is the character of God. On the side of the Law as well as on that of the prophets God is represented as supremely holy. The regulations of the Law have as their aim the declaration and the preservation of this attribute: the claim on the people for justice and righteousness rises out of the Holiness of God, and further emphasizes the same point. So far as this is concerned there is no serious difference between legal and prophetic theology. Both schools

¹ Or, bless themselves by him: *i.e.* Abraham's "blessings will attract the regard of all peoples, and awaken in them the longing to participate in them." Driver, *Genesis*, p. 145.

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of thought, also, are affected by the consciousness of sin; but this sense is much more poignant and personal in the prophetic writers and Psalmists than in the Law, and in these there is besides a strong feeling that the sacrificial system is an inadequate corrective. Further, the Divine holiness implies, on its other side as it were, exclusiveness in the matter of religion—what is called in its earlier stages, jealousy. The claim of God brooks no rivals: and if, at first, this idea rested upon the tribal self-consciousness rather than upon deeper grounds, the development of Judaism finds full justification for it, first in the undeniable inferiority of the rival cults, and then in the conviction of their inherent falsity. The religion of Jehovah stands out as the self-manifestation to the Jewish people of a holy and true God, against a host of false representations of Him of purely human origin.

There is another attribute of God of which we hear much in the prophetic and devotional books, the loving-kindness of God. He demands exclusive devotion and condemns all idolatry, but this is not due, so to say, to caprice or mere jealousy; it belongs

to the loving purpose of God which He is trying to carry out through the wayward agency of men. In spite of sin He aims at a renewed and perfect intercourse with man, in a regenerated world, from which the warfare in nature, and the injustice in society, should have been finally excluded. Towards this end all His action in the world is directed ; and His purpose persists in spite of all that the chosen nation can do to delay and thwart it : the promise cannot come utterly to an end, or fall unfulfilled.

It is in this connexion that we understand in what sense the knowledge of God obtainable in the Jewish revelation was regarded as imperfect. Man is not treated as possessing complete knowledge of God. But the limits under which he is bound are, if we may use the phrase, not metaphysical but historical. Man is limited not because the stage of being on which he exists has some fundamental incapacity for knowing God : he does not have to free himself by such means as he can find from the burden of the body or the material world, as though this were incompatible with spiritual truth. In its way, the natural world reveals God : man

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sees His hand in the order and the mystery of nature ; but the knowledge attained in this way leaves much still unknown. The prophets explain the meaning of the events which befall the people in terms of the Divine providence, and they look forward to a time when the will of God will be fully declared and accepted.¹ In nature and in history knowledge of God is to be found. Man comes short of full knowledge of God not by reason of the physical character of the world in which God has placed him, but on his own side in consequence of sin and on the side of God by reason of His plan of revealing Himself in divers parts and manners. Man's task is not to struggle to escape from the physical conditions which God has ordained, but to obtain forgiveness of his sins, to keep the commandments, and to follow the guidance of the voice of God. By these means he will secure in the ordinary ways of life all that he can attain of the knowledge of God at each stage.

It is difficult to exaggerate the profound importance of this point of view : it opens

¹ The Book of Wisdom, which displays signs of Greek philosophical influences, speaks of the soul as being pressed down under the weight of the material body : but this is not the native Jewish attitude.

the way to solve one of the most serious difficulties in religion, the problem of adjusting it and the contents of the religious world to the world of ordinary experience. From the Jewish point of view there is an element of unreasonableness in this problem from the first. To the Jewish mind as expressed in the Old Testament the world of experience has God in it, so to speak, to begin with: God acts in it, and reveals Himself in it in various ways: and the ultimate explanation of all that happens in it is its relation to God. The world is not perfect: there is sin and evil in it; but it is capable of revealing God continuously as He wills. It suggests dark problems as to the mode in which it is governed, and some of these may be insoluble at any stage of our knowledge; but there is no doubt that to keep the declared commandments of God is wisdom based on sound and trustworthy knowledge, and brings man into certain intercourse with Him.

There is an impassable gulf between this method of looking at the world, as a medium of God's self-revelation, and that which begins by assuming an order, whether physical or moral, which is self-contained, and from

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which it may be possible to step out, by logic or speculation, and find God, so to speak, outside. And the result of the two is not less fundamentally different than their method. If we start from our observations of the physical world, let us say, and work them up into a systematic shape, they may suggest to us, with more or less force and emphasis, a particular solution of the question how this order in which we live came into existence ; but they will not enable us to decide finally upon this question, or supply us with unexceptionable criteria for deciding any other questions which we may choose to ask about the cause of all existence. The question of God's existence will still be a physical or metaphysical one, and we shall not derive from it any secure knowledge of what man most wants to know—the Character of God.

So again the moral order may lead us to think that the world has the appearance of being under moral government, but in itself will not enable us to determine this issue finally, or to meet difficulties such as those caused by the presence of evil and undeserved suffering, or to decide any of the questions which arise as soon as we attempt to work

out this hypothesis in detail. However necessary it may be—and it is necessary for certain purposes—to look at experience from the point of view of the intellect alone, or the conscience alone, it must always be remembered that these are limited views, and that their limitations pervade all that is done in them. It is not meant that the intellect or the conscience are incapable of the truth which belongs to their separate spheres of operation, but only that these spheres are limited, and that the truth attainable in them is limited also. The Jewish mind did not, so far as it appears in the Old Testament, conceive of the world primarily as an object of sense-perception, or as a system of mechanical laws, or as a scene of moral and social processes, but primarily as the scene of Divine action. It was a world in which God took definite action, and made Himself known; the Jew, therefore, did not concern himself with partial and abstract views of the world. Any problems raised from these points of view would be expected to find their place and their solution in the religious sphere; but there is no disposition to build up speculative systems. Even the problems

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of pain and immortality are solved, so far as they are solved, by reference to the Character of God. Thus we may say that two points emerge from our consideration of the Old Testament: (1) that the order in which man lives is a single system, religious through and through; (2) that his knowledge of God is *given* him, by means of men specially chosen and qualified, in the ordinary world in which he lives.

Throughout the Old Testament this conception was gradually built up. The various elements in the various books contribute towards it. The content of God's self-revelation is not, however, regarded as complete: a further stage is still to come, in which the deficiencies of the earlier periods will be finally made up. The New Testament records this new revelation. The prevailing idea of the world is exactly the same as in the Old Testament. The activity of God is assumed in it: the whole course of things is seen from the spiritual point of view: and God has again visited His people. But there is a difference in the outlook. The Old Testament looked forward; but the New Testament, though it also looks forward, rests upon

a conspicuous achievement. The whole burden of it is based upon the Person and Life of Christ. In the Gospels we have fragmentary records of acts and words of His before the Crucifixion, and of the Resurrection and Ascension after. All the teaching which we find in the Epistles avowedly depends upon and assumes the previous manifestation of Christ. The Crucifixion and Resurrection are the events upon which the weight of the teaching is placed, and there are scarcely any other references to particular acts and words. But it is not too much to say that the whole meaning of the New Testament—its expectations in the future no less than its records of the past—would be unintelligible without the activity of Christ behind it. The writers conceive themselves as interpreting in the power of the Holy Spirit the significance of the Life of Jesus. Our Lord is never treated simply as one of the prophets. When the Apostolic writers refer to the prophets their interest in them lies in their message, their words, and the fact that they spoke in the Name of God. The emphasis in the case of our Lord is laid upon Himself and His nature, especially as that is

declared in certain of His actions and their consequences. S. Paul and S. Peter have little to say of His teaching, but much of Himself—of His death and resurrection, and the consequences of being “in the Lord.” S. John speaks of the message which we heard from the beginning that we should love one another (1 Ep. iii. 11); but he is not less concerned than the others with the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ, and the power of the Blood of Jesus to cleanse us from all sin.

There is a new type of revelation to be seen in Christ, a revelation which forms the basis of a new order altogether. Before, men were called to obey a law revealed to them, to see the Hand of God in the history of the chosen people, to listen to the words of those whom God had sent. In the New Testament we have to deal primarily with a Person whose acts are of new and critical importance in the history of mankind, and with a message that derives its importance from the nature of the Person delivering it, and its relation to His life and death. Such a situation requires new treatment, and suggests a peculiar view of the authority of the records which convey

the new revelation to us. In the first place, the Apostles represent themselves as trustworthy witnesses in regard to certain occurrences: they report what they have seen and heard: their position arises out of their power to witness: their teaching depends upon their knowledge of the Lord. Secondly, it is doubtful whether they would claim less authority in regard to their interpretation of the events to which they witness. They do not, as we say, give chapter and verse. When S. Peter says there is no other Name than that of Jesus whereby we may be saved, he does not refer back to any special occasion or speech in which the Lord Himself laid down this interpretation of what He was to do or suffer. And S. Paul very definitely regards himself as conveying a message delivered to him by the Lord: "If we or an angel from heaven preach unto you another Gospel than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema" (Gal. i. 8). But there is no evidence that S. Paul or any other Apostle distinguished in regard to authority between witness to the fact of the resurrection, and teaching as to the meaning of the resurrection, or as to its relation to baptism. There

were regions in which he might think certain conduct desirable, but would admit that he had no commandment from the Lord on the subject (1 Cor. vii. 23) ; but teaching such as that above-mentioned does not come within them. S. Paul, like the other Apostles, claimed to teach authoritatively doctrine as well as fact. The newness of the character of the revelation gave it a new range. In one sense, no doubt, the revelation of Christ was continuous with what had gone before ; those who had received and understood God's previous utterances should have known how to welcome Jesus when He came. But it was also immensely in advance of anything that had gone before and profoundly different in character. The old truths of God's holiness, and long-suffering loving-kindness were there as in the Old Testament ; but as Christ differed profoundly from any prophet who had gone before Him, so the revelation which He could give of the character and purpose of God differed profoundly in extent and clearness and detail from anything that had gone before. God revealed His Name to Moses as He had never revealed it to Abraham : through Christ He revealed Himself

as only the Son which was in the bosom of the Father could reveal Him. There came through Him an immense access of new knowledge ; a new power of interpretation through the Spirit ; and a new society, not limited by physical descent, in which the Spirit should live and work.

II.

It will have been noticed that in what has been said so far about the Bible, I have treated it as a whole, or at least as a work composed of two connected but self-contained parts. I have left out of account the particular historical conditions of separate books, and the long period that went to the collecting of it into its present form. It is necessary that this should be done. The writers of the New Testament, and our Lord Himself, took over the Old Testament as a single whole, as it was by that time received in the Jewish Church. And the dropping off of various books which at one time had a chance of being accepted as part of the New Testament, leaves the canonical books standing as a whole in a somewhat similar fashion. They were selected out of a larger number in virtue of the unity of spirit displayed in them, and we shall never understand the use made of them by the Church, or their proper authority, if we forget this. But it is no less necessary

also to remember the history of all the books in both Testaments. They bear indelible marks of this, and the fact that they do so has raised a problem which, we may say, has occupied the Church from the beginning and still occupies it.

It is obvious to any one who bestows the most cursory glance upon the Bible that it contains a number of things of very various kinds. In the Old Testament, for instance, there are two accounts of the Creation, short notices of the history of the patriarchs and kings, the provisions of the Law, besides collections of prophecies and psalms, and other elements of various kinds.

In the New Testament there are letters on various subjects written at different times, four collections of events in the life of Christ, a sketch of early Church History, and an Apocalypse.

Both parts of the Bible are made up of somewhat heterogeneous materials: and if we are to understand the book as a whole, we have to consider the relation of the Old Testament to the New. On what principle or principles can the whole collection be treated? How is the Bible to be interpreted?

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This question arose in its simplest form at the very beginning of the activity of the Church. Our Lord claimed to have come not to destroy, but to fulfil: that is, He maintained that those who read the Old Testament rightly would have understood and accepted His claims. Thus one of the first questions confronting the Apostles in their ministry was one of interpretation. For one reason this question arose in a simpler form in the time of the Apostles, and for a short time after, than at any time since. When it arose, there was no New Testament. The Apostles had not before them the task of reconciling two sets of documents, both of which claimed to be authoritative; they had to justify their explanation of the books to which both they and their opponents appealed. There was no serious difference of opinion between the Jews and the Apostles as to the authority of the Old Testament books: the Apostles had been brought up to venerate them, like all Jews. Time would develop, by degrees, a serious difference of view in regard to them, but both parties must have started approximately from the same ground.

We find on looking at the various books of

the New Testament that this question of the authority and interpretation of the Old Testament was mainly one which concerned Jews. The Gentiles, naturally, did not accept its authority, and there was no need to appeal to it, in argument with them. But the Jews and the Apostles both accepted the Old Testament; it is important, therefore, if possible, to detect the general idea upon which the appeal to the Old Testament was made. If we may judge from the accounts of the speeches of Stephen and S. Paul at Antioch in Pisidia one line of argument rested upon the history of the chosen people. Stephen is charged with "speaking words against this holy place and the law" (Acts vi. 13). His reply is indirect. He selects from the past history of the Jews a series of occasions on which God was endeavouring to point a new way for them, while the representatives of the nation acted in opposition. Like Joseph's brethren who hated him for his dreams: like the people who refused to have the arbitration and help of Moses: like the nation which, in the wilderness and afterwards, continually fell into idolatry, and substituted a temple of their own choosing for the tabernacle which

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God had chosen, Stephen's opponents were resisting the Holy Ghost. More positively, and in less controversial tone, S. Paul makes a rapid sketch (Acts xiii. 17 foll.) of Jewish history to the arrival of John the Baptist, and then argues that Jesus is the fulfilment of all that had gone before. The arguments are not set out in full, but the principle of them is clear : God has dealt with the chosen people in the past by chosen men, sent for a special purpose, and His method has received a new and final illustration in the coming of Christ. The appeal is to the acts of God recorded in the history, and exhibiting a definite principle.

This method of dealing with the situation leads to a consequence which is somewhat startling to the modern mind. We find in the Gospels and Epistles what would be in a modern writer extremely reckless use of quotations from the Old Testament : we find words used as arguments with little or no consideration of the context. Passages from different books, for instance, are occasionally combined into one ;¹ and again words are isolated from their context and appealed

¹ A conspicuous illustration is to be found in Rom. iii. 10-18.

to as evidence for some particular point.¹ The New Testament writers seem to have felt that the inner purpose of the Old Testament was to foreshadow the Messiah, and that this fundamental aim held it all together as life occupies a whole body: so that, as the life is present in its fulness in every part of the body, the inner meaning of the Old Testament may be found at every point in it. But this is not all. The fulfilment of the promise of the Old Testament, in which the Apostles believed, was allowed to cast a light backward over its interpretation, so as to invert, in some cases, the literal meaning. In the text of it we constantly find the chosen people contrasted with the Gentiles, to whom the Word of the Lord has not come in anything like the same sense. The Jews had a privileged position: they, as S. Paul says (Rom. ix. 4), had the adoption and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law and the service of God, and the promises. But the coming of Christ had made plain that the position of privilege depended on something else than physical descent from Abraham: so that those who adhered to this as their

¹ Cf. Matt. i. 15; John xix. 24.

ground of confidence or boasting, after its inadequacy had been demonstrated by the coming of Christ, fell outside the covenant limits. Hence we find the meaning of passages in the Old Testament reversed and the Jews—in the physical sense—relegated to the inferior position of the Gentiles. An important instance of this is in Rom. x. 5–8. In this passage S. Paul is contrasting the Jewish attitude with the righteousness which is of faith. “*Moses writes,*” he says, “*that the man that doeth the righteousness which is of the law, shall live in it.*” Then he goes on, “*But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh thus : Say not in thy heart, Who shall go up into heaven ? (that is to bring Christ down) : or Who shall go down into the depth ? (that is to bring Christ back from the dead). But what saith it ? The word is near thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart : that is the word of faith which we preach.*” S. Paul is here quoting from Deut. xxx. 11–14, but he has turned the sense completely round. In Deuteronomy Moses is represented as commending the “commandment which I command thee this day” (i.e. the legal system) to the Jews, on the ground that it is easy—“in thy mouth, and

in thy heart, that thou mayest do it." S. Paul puts the legal system in the position of the difficult and imperfect religion of the Gentile world, and then feels at liberty to apply Moses' commendation of it to the Church of Christ. This must not be regarded as a casual freedom, or a mere *argumentum ad hominem* : it is a real principle of interpretation. So Dr. Hort writes of S. Peter : ¹ "S. Peter, as doubtless every other Apostle, regarded the Christian Church as first and foremost the true Israel of God, the one legitimate heir of the promises made to Israel, the one community which by receiving Israel's Messiah had remained true to Israel's covenant while the unbelieving Jews in refusing their Messiah had in effect apostatized from Israel. . . This is the true key to most of the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament generally, and it has especially to be remembered in this Epistle."

I have remarked that the question of interpreting the Old Testament arose in its simplest form in connexion with the discussion between the Apostles and the Jewish Church. We have a more complicated problem when

¹ First Epistle of Peter, p. 7.

the Church comes in contact with the Greeks. The connexion of the Old Testament and the new teaching, afterwards embodied in the New Testament, was of comparatively small interest to them or at least was interesting in a very different way.

Before approaching this subject directly it is necessary to say a few words about the condition of the Greek world in regard to the Hebrew Scriptures. At the time of the Birth of Christ the whole of the Hebrew sacred books had long been before the learned Greek world in a version which we call the Septuagint. There are many problems as to the date and history of this version and the others which were also in circulation : it will be unnecessary to refer to these. The main facts of the origin of the version are fairly clear. From the time of the foundation of the city of Alexandria, a large colony of Jews had resided there, adhering closely to the ancient religion, but gradually giving up the use of Hebrew in favour of Greek. For the benefit of these people, and possibly with the assistance of the Court—and possibly also with some idea of winning adherents to the Jewish religion—the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into that

form of Greek which was the current speech in Egypt, and has recently come to life again in the papyri. The process of translation was probably spread over a number of years, but it is probable that it was complete for all the books before the Christian era. Much might be said as to the value of the LXX as a translation; there is, however, only one point in this connexion which concerns us. It seems certain that the translators endeavoured to modify phrases here and there which were likely to grate upon philosophic Greek ears. The Hebrew Scriptures do not fear to speak of God in terms of human life and experience. He walks in the garden in the cool of the day: He repented that He had made man: Nadab and Abihu saw the God of Israel. It had become an axiom with the philosophers that all such ascriptions of human characteristics to God were erroneous. In a large number of cases the LXX paraphrases and does not translate the words, *e.g.* Nadab and Abihu saw the place where God stood.¹ Thus the makers of the Greek version had already felt a difficulty which does not seem to have given trouble to the Jews at home. But it is an

¹ Ex. xxiv. 10, and many other places.

important indication, for it calls attention to a problem which, though S. Paul and S. Peter never raised it, affects all the Christian use of the Bible in the educated world. The Old Testament contains not only lofty prophecies and psalms of spiritual devotion, it contains also many anthropomorphisms ; many histories which are strange and unedifying as they stand. What is to be done with them ? May we get rid of the Old Testament, with its survivals of obsolete points of view ? Is it vitally connected with the New Testament ? Are they both essential to the full understanding of Christianity ? or may we regard the Old Testament as having done its work, and as being of no direct religious importance at the present time ?

There is a very real and serious problem here, and it has been productive of much controversy and discussion : perhaps only in the present time we can begin to see our way to something like a satisfactory solution. The question affects the Old Testament most gravely. The New Testament comes from an atmosphere which was homogeneous : different minds were at work in it, but they were all under much the same influence, and

the whole series of books was produced in about fifty years. But the Old Testament preserves elements of various stages of civilization, of various degrees of religious knowledge, as well as different types of literary composition, and its unity therefore is much harder to understand. There were certain persons who would break the link which binds the two Testaments together. Marcion the Gnostic was one; and the whole succession of Manichean heretics adopted the same principle. They all objected to the readiness with which the actions of God are expressed in terms of human experience, and to the frank acceptance by the Jews of the ordinary world. To them the Old Testament was the account of a different God, inferior and hostile to the God of the New Testament. And the learned and refined thinkers of the Greek world were not much less contemptuous in dealing with the Old Testament: they saw in it signs of the uninstructed and fallacious ideas of God which appeared in their own myths.

The Church refused to allow this break between the Old and New Testaments, and from an early date a method of interpreting both Testaments became prevalent which

really reigned until the time of the Reformation. This was the allegorical method ; it is of some importance to have a clear idea of it.

In the first place, let us notice that it was not specifically Christian ; and secondly, that it had been applied with great ingenuity to the Old Testament by Philo, the Jew of Alexandria. I will develop these points shortly. The Greeks were in possession of a complicated mythology which they had inherited from their ancestors ; and the doings of the Olympian gods occupied a large space in the Homeric poems. These poems are sometimes said (inaccurately) to have been the Greek Bible. It is true that they were taken as giving a historical account of the early kings and heroes of Greece, and that cities were as anxious to find themselves mentioned in them as people are in modern times to have had an ancestor in the army of William the Conqueror. Also the early education of all Greek children began with the poems of Homer. But as the conscience of the people grew more enlightened it became clear that the Olympian gods were morally disreputable from a human point of view. The most ordinary human passions—jealousy, lust,

anger, and the like—were exhibited by them ; they were capable of being wounded in battle, they died and suffered many unworthy things. Plato proposed to exclude the Homeric poems altogether from his ideal state, but the Stoic philosophers in the century before Christ found out a more excellent way—the way of allegory. The Stoics were not the first to use the method, but they seem to have been the first to use it in a comprehensive and systematic way. They maintained that the literal sense was unimportant, and that, if these poems were to be treated rightly, it was necessary to penetrate to the less unworthy and blasphemous doctrine—usually of a scientific or ethical character—which they enshrined.¹ This method, then, was already prevalent and held in high esteem as applied to the Homeric poems ; Homer was supposed to be conveying through them, by means of allegory, knowledge and speculation as to nature and life.

Philo found the same method convenient for a slightly different purpose. He was an

¹ There is a book extant in which this process is applied systematically to almost the whole of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* : it was written by one Heraclitus of Pontus about the time of the Christian era : it is called *Quæstiones Homericæ*. The principle is stated in the first chapter. Πάντη γάρ ἡσέβησεν Ὅμηρος εἰ μὴδὲν ἡλλογόρησεν, *Qu.*, *Hom.*, ch. i. (ed. Teubner).

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Alexandrine Jew, rather an older contemporary of our Lord, deeply convinced that in the Law all truth was to be found. But he was also a diligent student of Greek philosophy, especially of the stoicized platonism which prevailed in Alexandria. He held, moreover, that in this also the human mind could attain truth, and he not unnaturally inferred that, if so, the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greek philosophy must somehow express the same meaning. Accordingly, he set to work, with the allegorical method to help him, to put a philosophical explanation upon the Hebrew Scriptures. His writings are very numerous, and are almost entirely concerned with this business of interpretation. Far the largest part of them is concerned with the Pentateuch, but he quotes nearly all the books of the Old Testament. I will take an illustration of Philo's method, that you may see how he goes about his interpretation. I have chosen the story of Sarah and Hagar, because S. Paul has allegorized this in his own way in Gal. iv. Abraham, says Philo, stands for the man who is striving after the life of contemplation and true knowledge. Sarah represents the achievement of this aim

—the complete and perfect life of wisdom and self-control—and her offspring is the glorious result of such a life. The aspiring soul, Abraham, is not at first capable of attaining its end, and therefore the marriage of Abraham and Sarah is for many years childless. By the advice of Sarah, Abraham enters into a form of wedlock with her handmaiden, Hagar, who stands for secular education and practice. When this marriage has borne fruit, that is, when the secular education is complete, then the higher marriage can be productive. After this, the inferior offspring has to be cast out.¹ You will notice that in this exposition—which is a summary of a long discussion—the actual living people—Sarah, Abraham, Hagar—virtually disappear. Philo does not say in so many words that he thinks the passage a mere allegory, but there is no sign that he gives it any other value: the historical meaning of the passage is of no interest to him.

I have pointed out that the Bible does not carry its own interpretation, and that its structure and constitution confront us

¹ Philo, *De Cong. Erud. Grat.*, and *De Cherubim*, s. 3. Light-foot, *Ep. to Galatians*, pp. 159 foll., 198 foll. Ed. 6.

with problems. Questions of a somewhat similar character had been raised in Greek religion and philosophy, and were actually being solved by the method of allegory. This method stood ready to the hand of those who had to explain the Christian position to the Greeks, and it is not surprising that it was adopted. But it is obvious that such a method of interpretation is open to one serious danger—that it may relegate the literal and historical meaning of the text to a wholly inferior place. I think it certain that Philo, in his anxiety to establish his philosophical theories, did neglect, and probably forget, the literal sense. Lightfoot, in his Commentary on the Galatians (p. 198), argues that the difference between S. Paul's allegorizing and that of Philo is that S. Paul did, and Philo did not, think of Abraham and Sarah as historical persons, whose experiences indicated the way in which God had been pleased to act in regard to them. I do not feel sure that, even for S. Paul, the historical aspect of the story has much part in the *argument*: the argument seems to be *ad hominem*. S. Paul contends that Jewish methods make for his conclusions rather than theirs. And he

uses arguments in a current style to prove his point. But it is certain that the historical acts of God in the past are used by the New Testament writers as grounds for expectation of similar activity in the future. It is assumed that we may look to see the Hand of God in history, and that we may expect that He will act similarly in similar circumstances—that He acts, not by caprice, but on a reasonable plan.

There can be no doubt that the ecclesiastical writers tended to lay undue emphasis on the allegorical meaning. They had, as I have pointed out, the difficulties of the accounts of Creation—the presence of stories such as that of Abraham's deceit, and others even less edifying—to explain away. But they had also a feeling that mere details of fact were not worthy of a position in Holy Scripture. Thus S. Augustine asks, "If an ark had to be made in order to avoid the deluge, what need is there for its measurements to be mentioned, or for these particular measurements to be taken at all, or handed down to posterity in writings for a religious end?"¹ All such phrases as this, and they

¹ *C. Faust*, 12. 38.

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are very frequent, pointed towards an unsatisfactory depreciation of the literal sense.

The history of the interpretation of Scripture is long and complicated: the principles of it and their application would require copious discussion. I propose only to mention one or two points in it, which are necessary to the understanding of what comes after. So far we have thought, practically, of two modes of interpretation only: the literal and the allegorical. It soon came about that this number was extended. The first name to be considered in this connexion is that of the great Alexandrine scholar, Origen. In a great work upon the Principles of Theology, he deals at length with the question of Scripture.¹ He says, "We find in Solomon, in Proverbs, the following injunction concerning the divine decrees in Scripture: Do thou copy them in threefold fashion in will and knowledge." This is the LXX rendering of Prov. xxii. 20; the Greek word for "in threefold fashion" is not in the Hebrew. Either the LXX is based on a different text, or there is a mistranslation. Origen then proceeds to argue that, as man consists of body, soul, and spirit,

¹ *De Princ.* iv. c. 2, 11-13.

so Scripture may be expected to have a three-fold sense : literal, corresponding to the body ; applied, corresponding to the soul ; spiritual, corresponding to the spirit of man. This belief in a multiple sense of Holy Scripture was further defined by Augustine and others. Augustine (*Util. Cred.*, iii. 5) speaks of a four-fold sense, and in the second and third books of the *De Doctrina Christiana* he discusses at length the proper method of interpretation by this fourfold means. In the Middle Ages the fourfold sense had become the rule, and it was the authoritative method of interpretation at the time of the Reformation. So (Aquinas *S. T.*, I. i. art. x.) says as follows : “The first meaning, that by which words signify things, belongs to the first sense, which is the historical or literal sense. The second meaning, by which the things signified by the words themselves signify other things, is called the spiritual sense, and is based upon the literal and presupposes it. But this spiritual sense is divided into three. The principle by which things belonging to the old law are types of things belonging to the new is the *allegorical* sense : when things done in Christ or signifying Christ are signs

of what we ought to do, we have the moral sense: when these typify that which is in the glory to come, we have the anagogic sense."

Theoretically, all this superstructure begins with the literal sense, as appears in the passage just cited from Aquinas: and there are not wanting in the Middle Ages reasonable views as to the importance of the literal meaning of Holy Scripture. For instance, in a treatise addressed by a Carthusian monk named Guigo, to the Convent of Mont Dieu (Sæc. xj.), we find this: "The monk must get time for reading at fixed hours and of a fixed character. Casual and scattered reading, taken up as it were by chance, does not edify, but makes the mind unstable. Things lightly received, lightly depart from the memory. We must dwell upon the Bible with fixed minds, with fixed intelligence, and train our minds to it. The Scriptures should be read in the same spirit as that in which they were written, for it is by that that they must be understood. You will never understand the meaning of S. Paul till by the use of a good intention in reading him, and the effort of continual meditation you imbibe his spirit. You will never understand David until by

actual experience of your own you make your own the emotions of the Psalms.”¹

It is obvious that fixed rules of interpretation such as those prevailing in the Middle Ages, would have been of great value, so long as the Church had to deal with a public that could not read, and was prepared to accept its authority. The Roman Church maintains them and forbids not so much the use of Scripture as the adoption of private interpretations of it. It does not deny the Divine authority of the books of the Old and New Testament. The Council of Trent (Sess. IV. Dec. i.) receives and venerates all the books both of the Old and New Testaments, since one God is author of both ; but it puts them before the people with an interpretation or gloss, of which the rules are as we have just described. It is this right to gloss or interpret authoritatively that came into discussion when the Reformation began, bringing with it a distrust of the authorized system of interpretation, and a strong movement towards the literal interpretation.

The Reformers had clearly a strong case.

¹ Bk. I. ch. x. 31. The treatise is printed in the appendix to the works of S. Bernard (Benedictine Edition).

A man who writes a book does so because he has, or thinks he has, something definite to say. If he is reasonably capable as a writer, the first and literal meaning of his book will be the only one attributable to him. No Christian can fail to give predominant importance to the evidence of Holy Scripture: it would seem natural, therefore, to rest upon this, literally interpreted, as an unshakable basis of faith. But here the question of the history and relation of the various books arises and causes difficulty. Granted that the proper *meaning* of the Bible is its literal meaning, is the literal meaning of every verse of equal *religious* value? It would seem impossible to answer "yes" to this question. The books, as we have noticed, touch upon a great variety of subjects, of which some have no obvious connexion with religion. It is easy to argue that at any rate the first meaning of all statements upon any subject should be their literal meaning, but it would not appear to follow from this that all the books and all statements in them are of equal value and authority. A statement as to the age of Methuselah, or the population-number of the Israelites in the wilderness, might conceivably be inaccurate

without affecting in any degree the religious value of the book in which it occurred. Or, again, the command to keep the sabbath day ; Isaiah's declaration in the Name of the Lord, "new moons and sabbaths I cannot away with" ; our Lord's statement that the sabbath is made for man : these are irreconcilable on a basis of literal interpretation, if that is combined with the assumption that all passages in the Bible are of equal weight and authority. But in effect this assumption was made, and has caused great difficulty ever since. We may wonder that the assumption ever was made, when we think of the actual structure of the Bible ; and the fact that it was (if it be not too great a paradox to say so) is not due to the Reformers, but is a survival from the pre-Reformation period. So long as the ecclesiastical method of interpretation prevailed, it was easy to maintain the equal infallibility of each and every part of Holy Scripture. The age of Methuselah, or the numbers of the Israelites, were probably accepted as facts, but the interest of them was in their mystical meaning. Thus the multiple sense was a way of overcoming difficulties, smoothing out contradictions, and differences of point of view ;

and it was because of the existence of these things, as I have pointed out, that the use of allegory had been adopted. It was an inconvenient result, to say the least of it, of the form taken by the appeal to Scripture, that the belief in the full inspiration and authority of each word in it was retained without any recognized method of explaining the meaning of the infallible word. No book explains itself. It is always written in relation to the circumstances of the time when it comes into existence. And a book like the Bible, constituted by the collection of a number of books written independently under various conditions, demanded interpretation more urgently than any other. It is true that when the old system became matter of question it was difficult to see how to supply its place except by an appeal to the literal meaning. But it must be admitted that this appeal did not solve all the difficulties for which it was invoked, and has left a number of problems for solution which can hardly yet be said to be finally settled.

The first of these, and perhaps the most insoluble, is that which is concerned with the interpreter. Is interpretation the right of all

intelligent persons equally? It is always assumed that the author can have had only one meaning and that it must be possible to discover what this is. This sounds the most reasonable of all contentions, but unfortunately it is not verified in practice. Even when writer and interpreter both speak the same language, it does not appear possible to secure absolute certainty in the interpretation. But in dealing with the Bible at the time of the Reformation there was the fact that the original languages in which the books were written were not native to any of the disputants. Latin was second nature to all scholars up to the time of the Reformation, and the Roman Church binds itself to the Latin version. But the Hebrew and the Greek are the original, and the Latin has no case if it could be shown to have diverged from its originals. There were further difficulties due to the transmission of the books by MS. copies. Thus there were obvious and serious obstacles in the way of interpretation. It was not in the power of every one to read and be sure that he understood. No one could interpret securely without qualifying himself to do so by study and a considerable

amount of learning, and even then it did not appear that all were agreed or were likely to agree. The Puritans felt this difficulty no less than the Romans. We find (cf. Hooker's *Eccl. Pol.*, V. xxii.) that they protested against reading publicly without interpretation just because the reading did not carry the full meaning to the mind.

Thus there was serious danger of real chaos and the collapse of Church unity through the multitude of voices. In practice, this extreme result was avoided by the voluntary grouping of persons who had come to put the same interpretation upon the Scriptures, and these were greatly helped by the publication of Confessions, such as that of Augsburg. But there were at the time of the Reformation sects like that of the Anabaptists resting upon unbridled private judgment which were a serious danger to Christianity. It will be our task in the remaining lectures to consider these problems in their modern form.

III

LAST time I pointed out some of the difficulties which arose in connexion with the very natural desire to deal with the Bible like any other book, and assign to its words their literal meaning. We saw how the mystical interpretation had come to be, and how the desire for the literal interpretation arose out of its extravagancies, and the reasons why this simple method could not prove satisfactory. I propose to-day to give some idea of the nature and effect of the modern critical methods. The subject has grown to enormous dimensions, and I doubt whether any one is qualified to speak with expert knowledge of the whole of it. In what I shall say, I must necessarily depend very largely upon the writings of others, and I want to make it perfectly clear that I shall only be able to touch upon an extremely small part of the whole subject. I shall only be able to tell you what I hope will be enough to show how inevitable the whole business has been, and

how much has been gained by it in many ways. I shall begin with the Old Testament.

(a) Let us notice, first, that almost the whole process has taken place within about one hundred years. Before it began, men had an extremely restricted notion of the ancient world. A boy when he went to school,—if he went to any of the greater Foundations—was taught as a matter of course Latin and Greek, and made to read the great authors of ancient Greece and Rome. If he was a clever boy and a good student he would know a considerable number of the greatest books ever written, and he would have that sort of knowledge of the civilization of Greece and Rome which you can get from reading the books. Some few students might have the chance of visiting Italy and Greece, but for the most of them their knowledge would depend entirely on their reading. The old scholars knew all this wonderfully well: and they would be able to use one book to explain others. They were also trained, of course, to read the Bible, and in some schools all the boys in the upper forms learnt Hebrew; I believe they do so still at Merchant Taylors. With or without Hebrew, they would be

expected further to know the Bible really well, and if they profited by their instruction they would know what the Bible had to say about the patriarchs, kings, prophets and others, and what was incidentally stated there of the history of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. In the New Testament they would find the two streams of history combining. Our Lord was born and the Church began its life under the Roman Empire. Classical books would from that time forward illustrate the books of the Bible. Some intrepid and adventurous persons would learn other languages than these—Syriac, Coptic, Arabic ; but the average man of learning would be content with Latin and Greek and possibly Hebrew. You will see from this that when an ordinary educated man thought of the ancient world he thought of Greece, Italy, and Palestine in a kind of vivid light, with a vast and almost unexplored background behind them of which he only knew very fragmentary details. The life of Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, was not real to him in the degree in which the life of Greece and Rome were. The task of the last century has been to explore this background and to people it with real

figures instead of shadows. I will illustrate this statement very briefly.

Our main sources of information about these Eastern countries had been the reports of travellers. The interest of the sites in Palestine and to some extent in Egypt, had attracted pilgrims for many centuries, and in later times, travellers for pleasure. But no one knew the Egyptian language or had read any of the hieroglyphic inscriptions. The first move in this direction was made in 1802, by the decipherment by a Swedish scholar of a part of the demotic text of the trilingual Rosetta Stone; it was not till 1832 that the language of the hieroglyphics could be said to be securely known. In like manner, the cuneiform writing of which the very existence had been scarcely known before 1800, was deciphered and its alphabet determined during the same period: two English names are conspicuous in the story, Sir H. Rawlinson and Sir H. Layard. The period 1851-1856 was that of great activity in this region of discovery, and from that date we may say that the language of the great Eastern Empires became intelligible to scholars. Other discoveries of somewhat less importance were

made in other parts of the East. But the result of the whole process was most important. We came into possession of a clear and detailed knowledge of the life of the two great peoples of Egypt and Babylonia. Instead of being simply a dim background to the history of Palestine, we know them now as nations: we know their laws, customs, religion and history, and we have acquired a new view of their relation to the Jews. The history in the Bible is not detailed; even the history in Kings and Chronicles is written with a definitely religious purpose, and only such facts are mentioned as bear on this. But the information from the Egyptian and Babylonian Inscriptions comes from annals, and codes of law, contracts, letters and documents of all kinds, such as we ordinarily use in making a history. We are enabled, therefore, to fill out, and at times to correct the names, dates and other details which we find in the books of the Bible. This is true especially of the names and dates of the Assyrian and Babylonian kings. But perhaps, the most important of the results of all this newly discovered information is the altered view of the isolation of the Hebrew

nation. When there was no real background to what we know of their life, they seemed more completely separate and peculiar than we now know them to have been. In the Code of Hammurabi we have a legal system showing many close affinities with the Pentateuchal legislation, and in the Babylonian accounts of the Creation and the Flood we find that there were points of contact of no small importance between Palestine and Babylon, even in the matter of religion.¹ The researches which have led to these results, and many others of a similar kind, have been achieved by excavating the sites of ancient places: the records and relics of past ages have been brought to light out of the sandy soil which has preserved them.

Another line of enquiry has been pursued not only by means of excavation of monuments, but by studying people. This is the special method of comparative religion. I have already noticed the discovery of tablets bearing on the religion of Babylon. It is obvious that monuments which opened so large and varied a view of the life of ancient

¹ Driver. Schweich Lectures, 1908. *Modern Research as illustrating the Bible.*

peoples would be likely to increase our knowledge of their religion : we should understand and appreciate their ideas and still more their religious practices as had never been possible before. We should expect, and our expectations have been realized, that we should become aware of likenesses as well as differences between the religion of the Jews and that of other ancient peoples. But what we call comparative religion covers a much wider field than this. The monuments of which we have been speaking concerned the nations with which the Jews were in contact. The last century was noted for an enormous extension of our knowledge of religion all over the world. Under the impulse of the late Prof. Max Müller, the books of the religions of Asia were made available to the English reader in the great series of Sacred Books of the East. From those it was possible to ascertain the written tradition as to the religions of India, Persia, China, and Arabia. All these were religions expressed in books, and they are all advanced religions. But there are endless numbers of religious facts and ideas belonging to uncultivated peoples which have been gradually accumulated,

largely owing to the labours of missionaries, with the result that the whole meaning and significance of the religious problem has been changed. It began to seem possible out of all this mass of information to obtain answers of a scientific character to the questions of the origin of religion, its truth and its value. Careful study and comparison of all the available phenomena showed that there is much more in common between the crude and undeveloped religions and those which are advanced and stereotyped in books than had been supposed. Nor is it only in the higher pagan religions that parallels with early religious ideas are to be found; they appear in the Jewish law of sacrifice, and thereby raise questions as to the nature of revelation and the meaning of the terms, true and false, in matters of religion.

I have not space to enter in detail into these various new developments: either the extended knowledge due to the excavation and decipherment of monuments or that to the study of various types of religion would need a set of lectures in itself. But I wish to make plain that all this is real knowledge of fact which cannot be denied and that it must,

therefore, be taken into consideration in any view we may adopt of religion. Moreover, it cannot fail to affect our view of the Bible. If we find, as we have, tablets proving that Palestine was an Egyptian dependency before the date at which Joseph and Jacob went down there : if we find conclusive evidence—as we have—that the name of the King who took Samaria is inaccurately stated in the Book of Kings, or that Belshazzar or Darius the Mede were never kings of Babylon, we cannot avoid facing the question to what extent does the Bible claim authority in such matters : is a misstatement on a point of this kind conclusive against its value ? Again, when the wide field of comparative religion opens before us, and we find not only points of similarity between the practices of primitive people and the heathen religions described in the Old Testament, but similarities in the idea of sacrifice, of the atoning value of blood and the like, we cannot avoid asking how the religion of the Bible differs from that of these other people, whether we can still maintain the ancient sharp distinction between heathen and Jewish religion, between revealed and natural religion. These are not perverse and

unnecessary questions: they come up inevitably in the present condition of things and would have come up before if the facts which give rise to them had been known.

There is a third aspect of the Old Testament books which has also received special attention in the present time. These books are for the most part anonymous: the author is not named on the title-pages. We generally call the books of the Pentateuch, in accordance with tradition, the books of Moses. In the Hebrew Bible these books form the first section, which is entitled *The Law*: the separate books are in Hebrew described by their first words. Our names for them come from the Greek Bible. The second section of the Hebrew Bible is called *The Prophets*: it includes Samuel and Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the minor Prophets. Of these the historical books are completely anonymous: the others are collections of prophecies ascribed to certain prophets, but it is not explicitly said that the prophecies were collected into their present shape by the prophet as well as originally composed by him. The third section is called *The Writings*: this

contains Daniel and Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Job, Proverbs, the Psalms, etc. Here, again, there are collections and compilations and the question of the actual author is not explicitly determined by the title. It is inevitable that these facts when noticed should lead to questions. The immense additions recently made to the knowledge of the life and history of the peoples concerned make it necessary to try to fit the books and sections of books into their place in the history of events. Furthermore, it is necessary to attempt to discover the principle upon which such books as are compilations have been collected: to separate so far as may be the fragments of which they are composed and place them each in its proper historical context. Such work is of special value in connexion with a religion so closely associated with history as that of the Old Testament.

All these various methods combined produce that attitude towards the Old Testament which is called *critical*: by which is meant that the books and their contents are brought into comparison with other books and evidence of all kinds, and an attempt is

made to place them in connexion with all this other knowledge. It is inevitable that some change should result in the view taken of them. When they stood up alone, thrown up, as it were, in full light against a dark background, it was impossible to see the lines of connexion between them and other things. Under the influence of the new knowledge we get a more natural picture of the whole environment in which God spoke to His chosen people. We see the Jews more as their contemporaries saw them : we see their life in its ordinary details rather than in the mysterious and piercing light by which the prophets interpreted their world. It is possible to represent these two points of view as incompatible, as if the world of experience must necessarily be either purely secular or purely supernormal. But this is really contrary to the whole spirit of the Bible, which, as I pointed out before, assumes always the ordinary world as the scene of God's self-manifestation. If we could succeed in reconstructing the world as it looked to Nebuchadnezzar, it would not follow that we had destroyed the view of it which belonged to Jeremiah. We should only know more

exactly the material upon which Jeremiah had to work.

(b) You will see from what has been said so far that in my opinion we stand to gain from the application of the critical principles of historical science to the books of the Old Testament. The increase of positive knowledge as to the Jews themselves and the nations surrounding is entirely to the good. There is value, though in my opinion less value, in a knowledge when it can be securely obtained, of the method upon which the compilations and collections, which form the larger number of the books, were made: but this value is largely increased if, by means of this critical analysis, we can obtain a clearer notion of the development of the knowledge of God among the Jews, and the stages by which the way was prepared for Christ.

We must now pass on to consider the application of the same principles of historical criticisms to the New Testament. And the first question to be raised is whether it is legitimate to apply critical principles to the New Testament as well as to the Old Testament. To this we may answer without more

ado that it is not only legitimate to do so, but necessary. The New Testament like the Old Testament needs to be placed in its proper historical surroundings with the aid of any new knowledge we can obtain: so far as principle is concerned there is no difference between the Old and New Testament. But there are considerable differences in the application of the principle, and it is of the highest importance to consider them.

In the first place, the origin of Christianity falls in a time of which we have long had very considerable knowledge. The history of the New Testament, instead of being, like that of the Old Testament before 1800, a vividly lighted field thrown up against a dark background, comes into close connexion with the classical tradition and literature. The discoveries affecting the New Testament have not like the others revolutionized our views of it. The ancient civilizations which excavation has brought to light rose and flourished and fell so far back that their effect on the Christian story is very slight, and entirely indirect. There have been few discoveries of lost books among the

papyri: even important ones, such as the account of the Athenian Constitution by Aristotle, the poems of Bacchylides, the comedies of Herodas leave things exactly as they were, so far as the New Testament is concerned. Our new knowledge has come mainly from the excavation of inscriptions and throws light chiefly on the relation of the early Christian Church to the Roman Empire. There are in the New Testament, as you will remember, a number of allusions to persons—the Roman Emperors, Augustus, Tiberius—Roman officials like Quirinius, Pontius Pilate, Gallio—to religious customs and worships—in Lystra, Athens: these and many others like them form points of contact with the world outside the Christian Church. When we find inscriptions alluding to the same people, and the same places, it becomes possible to test and verify the statements in the New Testament. The writer who comes most prominently forward in this connexion is S. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. A large amount of new light has come to the elucidation of his text from the travels and excavations of Sir W. Ramsay, and in the opinion of that author the

character of S. Luke as a careful and accurate historian is triumphantly vindicated. It must be repeated that though we have largely increased our knowledge in this way, there has been no such complete remodelling of our conception of the past as has resulted from the monuments of Egypt and Babylonia. And it must also be noted that the new knowledge is fragmentary and rather precarious in its distribution. The effect of it is, therefore, greater on the positive than the negative side. I will give an illustration of what I mean. The Romans used various titles for the chief magistrate of cities in their Empire: Proconsul, Proprætor, Procurator, etc. S. Luke appears to be careful and accurate in his use of them. In Acts xix. 31 (the account of the riot in the theatre at Ephesus) he mentions certain officials called Asiarchs. Inscriptions found on the actual site of the temple of Artemis verifies the existence of these officials. The name is an unusual one, and is, as it happens, amply confirmed. But if he had happened not to mention them at all, or if he had mentioned them and no inscription had turned up which also mentioned them, it would not have been

right to conclude that he was inaccurate.¹

Secondly, the religion set forth in the New Testament is a highly developed and elaborate system, which has continued in being from the date of the New Testament until the present day. It had a close connexion with the religion of the Jews in its most developed form—the form which is most clearly exhibited in the literary remains of Judaism. In other words, it stands at the furthest possible distance from practices and ideas which the comparative study of religions is best qualified to illustrate. It retains the ideas of Atonement and Sacrifice, which go back into the very earliest stages of religious thought, and in this sense comparative religion may still

¹ Let me try to invent a somewhat parallel case. The Incumbents of the parishes in England are called Vicars and Rectors. But in a place called Haccombe in Devonshire the Incumbent is, for some reason or other, called the Arch-priest. Now if I wrote an account of the Church in England, and some one reviewed and criticized it two thousand years hence, he might find that I did not mention this fact; if he happened to know it himself, he might be inclined to condemn me. But this would not be quite fair, unless I had a general habit of inaccuracy: a man might know a great deal about the Church in England without knowing that. And again, supposing I mentioned the Arch-priest of Haccombe, and my critic did not know the peculiar usage. It would not be fair to condemn it as inaccurate, even if it so happened that no inscription or other corroborating evidence existed.

have something to say to it. But it compares most naturally with the developed forms of contemporary paganism which we find in the Orphic mysteries, the worship of Isis and of Mithras.¹

Thirdly, there is a great and important difference between the Old and New Testament in regard to the books composing the two volumes. This may be exhibited in three respects: (1) I pointed out that comparatively few of the Old Testament books lay claim to a particular author: the historical books are almost all anonymous, and the books of the prophets and psalms are collections made by unknown hands. In the New Testament there are seven books which do not claim any named author—the four Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the First Epistle of S. John: all the others claim a particular author. That is to say, they come before us with a definite appeal, based on the position and character of the author as well as on their contents. This claim needs to be considered, tested, and if possible, verified. I shall have more to say about

¹ We may say here, by way of caution, that it is important to avoid being misled by superficial resemblances.

this point later on. (2) The New Testament books differ from those in the Old Testament in their nearness to the events and persons referred to, and in their relation to our own time. No doubt the large number of authentic prophecies still existing have been preserved from the time when they were first published and are contemporary evidence of the opinion of the prophets upon the events occurring within their experience. But the historical books are in many parts of them very distant indeed from the events described, even if we were to assign them to their traditional authors. For instance, even if we assumed that Moses himself compiled the Pentateuch, there would be an interval of something like one thousand years between him and Abraham. If the books of Kings were compiled at about the date of the fall of Jerusalem, there would be several centuries between that date and the times of David and Solomon. It is quite different with the New Testament. The whole or almost the whole of the events described, and the literature concerned fall between the date of the Crucifixion—say A.D. 27 and A.D. 100. The whole group of books is really the product of one age and

one environment, with which we ourselves have definite and unbroken connexion. Again, the text of the New Testament books has a complicated but much more secure history than that of the Old Testament. There is an immense gap between the earliest Hebrew MS. and the latest likely date of any Old Testament book. And the MS. evidence when it begins is to a text that has been revised and deliberately formulated. We are able by means of the Versions (*e.g.* the LXX) to correct these limitations to some extent, but it remains that the evidence for the text of the Old Testament is less satisfactory than for that of the New. The earliest complete MS. of the New Testament is less than four hundred years from the date of the writing of the books: there are at least three lines of MS. transmission which are more or less independent: and the existence of patristic writings and versions enables us to deal with the text of the New Testament on more comprehensive and scientific lines than with that of any other ancient book. There is not anything like such an amount of varied and important evidence for any book that comes to us from the ancient world. (3) These

points lead us to the third of the characters in which New Testament differs from Old Testament. The questions of the authenticity of the history, the correctness of the traditions as to the authorship of the books, and other such matters are of a different degree of importance in the New Testament, and require very careful handling. The early Christians and our Lord Himself received the Old Testament from the Jewish Church very much as we have it, and we know more or less for certain what opinion they held of it. We believe, as they believed, that we have genuine prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others : generally trustworthy, if not infallible, accounts of the history of the Jews, and full material for interpreting Jewish religion and understanding the connexion of our Lord's ministry with it. We have much fuller knowledge and therefore probably different ideas from those of the first Christians as to the relation of the Jews to the Empires of the East : we have probably different notions as to the way in which such of the books as are compilations were brought together, and the date at which the process was carried out. But the religious value of

the Old Testament is unchanged : it tells us, as of old, of the special spiritual preparation for Christ's coming : we could use all or almost all of the language we find in the New Testament about it : our differences, though profound and at first sight startling, are not final.

But the New Testament is not, like the Old Testament, the history of a process lasting through ages, and carried on by means of complicated events and the actions and words of men great and small, known and unknown : it is the history of the life of one Person, and the earlier results of it ; which results were as they were because of the character of the Person and the opinions held about Him by those who knew Him. This fundamental difference in the content of the Old and New Testaments gives a fundamentally different importance to the critical questions : and it is highly unscientific to ignore it. Supposing that critical science may lead us to hold that the book of Isaiah contains works by more than one prophet, this need not make the slightest difference either to the value of the prophecies themselves or to our general idea of the significance of Jewish religion : but a

disturbance of the connexion between the New Testament and our Lord and His age might leave us with no historic background for the Christian Church, and with nothing but a collection of more or less edifying ideas. The march of the history of the Jewish religion is so massively certain over so long a period that uncertainties and reconstructions even greater than any we are likely to be called upon to accept would leave us very much where we are: but the Christian religion, at any rate as the Christian Church has accepted it, is bound up with an authentic knowledge of the life and nature of our Lord.

It has been necessary to dwell upon this point at some length, as it is of great importance to insist that the New Testament requires separate treatment, and that the attainment of results of a certain kind in regard to the Old Testament is not in itself a reason for expecting similar ones in regard to the New. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that history deals with particular questions, not with general ones. It endeavours to discover and to establish the particular acts of particular persons in particular times and places: and it is, therefore, always perilous

to argue from one case to another. There is a real danger of being deceived by superficial resemblances, and of arriving thereby at fallacious conclusions. It is inevitable that critical questions of authorship, historical accuracy, textual transmission, and the like should be raised about the New Testament as about the Old: but the conclusions will certainly be wrong ones, unless each point under these heads is considered on its own merits and without prejudice from anything that may have been decided in so very different a field as that of the Old Testament.

The New Testament, then, is liable to criticism in exactly the same sense as the Old Testament or any other book: but like any other book it must be dealt with in the way which its peculiarities require; if this is not done, the criticisms will inevitably be fallacious. Criticism rightly conducted will end in giving an increased vividness and reality to the history: but criticism of the wrong kind will destroy all contact with reality and experience, and leave the books and all that has come out of them an insoluble problem. I cannot deny that in my view the New Testament has been subjected to a great deal of

criticism of the wrong type. Unfortunately, the time at our disposal is short, and I shall be unable therefore to cover the whole ground: it is possible that this may give the impression that I am more hostile than I really am to the critical methods. I mention, therefore, here my conviction of their value and necessity: but I am afraid that this will tend to be forgotten when I set out my grounds of complaint against some current methods and their results. This, however, cannot be helped: the matter is of great importance, and it is not right to be silent.

I. The first difficulty which I feel concerns certain presuppositions which appear to me to vitiate some conclusions now widely current. There is no question so hard to deal with fairly as this of presuppositions, for the simple reason that no one can carry on any investigation without them. We never start with blank empty minds upon which new knowledge is to be inscribed: what we call new knowledge is always an extension or a reorganization of what was there before. It is idle, therefore, to hope for the purely indifferent mind: such a thing does not really

exist. What we want for a successful enquiry is not a mind without presuppositions, but with valid and trustworthy ones, and without any which lurk unconsciously in the mind and are not recognized as being there. One of the peculiar features about the New Testament history is that there is an element of the miraculous in it, and this is one of the points on which it is very important to criticize our presuppositions. Roughly speaking, we may say that the whole tendency of critical discussion of the New Testament is towards ruling this element out of order. I want now to put as clearly and briefly as I can some considerations upon this subject which appear to me to be of great value.

(a) There are two separate questions which may be raised upon this subject, and it is important to keep them separate. One is this: Is a miracle possible? The other is this: Did this alleged miracle happen? In order to criticize the New Testament properly you want an answer to both these questions: and unless you face them both fairly and answer them, your criticism has a fatal weakness. It is also a serious weakness if you ostensibly discuss the historical evidence and

cherish all along the secret conviction that a miracle is impossible. It is a legitimate view to hold that no such thing can occur, but as an unconscious and unrealized pre-supposition it vitiates any argument which it affects. In order to make my point plainer, I will take a particular case which, to avoid any prejudice caused by associations, shall not come from the New Testament. It was alleged that a vision of angels had been seen at the battle of Mons. There are two questions raised by this: Is it possible? Is it true? And I think there are four attitudes of mind possible in regard to it. (i.) If I hold that there are no such beings as angels, then the story is impossible, and it is not of the slightest use to offer any historical evidence: the question is at an end. (ii.) If I hold that the thing is barely possible, but so unlikely that almost any hypothesis is better than thinking it true, the result is much the same: any historical evidence that may be alleged is heavily discounted from the first. This is the usual attitude towards all such stories. (iii.) If I say that there is a reasonable possibility that the story is true, but the evidence is poor, it has at least

become worth while to consider the value of the evidence. (iv.) If I say that the thing is possible and its evidence is good, then I believe the story.

The ordinary critical view of the miraculous is, as I have said, of the second variety. Its strength lies, not in its intrinsic value, but in the fact that we do not expect supernatural events in our own experience, and that in our dealings with Herodotus and other historians the truth or falsity of the miraculous stories does not matter. In a vast majority of the cases which occur up and down the whole field of history the stories of the supernatural are patently ridiculous or have no evidence to support them, so that the actual question involved in the supernatural is never really raised. But this is not true of the New Testament. Its history is a stage in the development of the historical self-manifestation of God; and the question really is, whether there is or is not some larger range of historical occurrence opened up in such a record: whether God is or is not bound to manifest Himself within the limits imposed by the intellectual observation of the external world. I think not:

the other assumption, consciously or unconsciously, underlies much modern criticism. This is a question which does not concern the history of Greece or Rome or England to any serious extent: but it is of vital importance in estimating the Gospel-story. Hence I urge that the discussion of the New Testament without a clear and reasoned decision on the question of the possibility of miracles is sure to lead to precarious results. We cannot approach the question without presuppositions: but it is of the most serious moment to know what our presuppositions are and why we hold them.

(b) A large part of the work that has been done in the field of New Testament criticism has been done by Germans. There is a disposition at the present time to shrink from everything German. It is easily intelligible, but it is likely, if we are not careful, to affect good things as well as bad. We must not dream of denying that much German scholarship is supremely good. Germans have a real enthusiasm for learning, and are unsparing of hard work. There is a larger class of them engaged in learned pursuits than there is here, and they take learning more seriously. But

it cannot be denied that in spite of all this they do contrive to reach a number of conclusions which do not attain wide acceptance, and I think there is a reason for this in connexion with our present subject which it is important to consider. I will try to explain briefly what this reason is, in my judgment : warning you that a full discussion of it would take us over a very wide field. The section of the German people which interests itself in these questions is mainly the Protestant section. There have been distinguished Roman Catholic scholars, such as Döllinger, Ehrhardt, and others, but the books which we read in this connexion come mainly from the Protestants. Now, in Germany the determining influence in Protestantism is that of Luther. Communities with other ancestry are combined in the State Church, I believe ; but Lutheranism is the predominant religion. You will remember that Luther's great principle on which he based his attack on Rome was that of justification by faith. He aimed at recovering personal religion, the sense of personal conviction of salvation, which seemed to him to have been crushed under the ponderous and mechanical system of the

Church. There is no doubt that this was seriously wanted ; it was of the utmost religious value to restore freedom of access between the single soul and God. It is true that this aspect of religion had tended to be neglected. But this was not quite all that happened. To his followers, if not to him, the Society, as such, seemed of secondary importance, and religion tended in consequence to become individualistic. To say that the Church must not stand as a barrier between man and God, and that owing to various accretions upon its doctrine it had come to do so, is true and was necessary to be said ; but to say that religion is *merely* a matter between the individual man and God, and that the Christian Society has no necessary function in the religion of Christ, is neither true nor Scriptural. But the tendency to use this language has never left Protestant religion : it is dominant in many forms of English Protestantism, and in one considerable section of opinion in the Church of England. The exaggerated claims of the Church of Rome have aided this result, so that it is seriously held by some that there is in fact no alternative to Romanism, except the

purely individualist position indicated above. It has seemed hardly possible to find a middle position by which the Society should be a necessary element in the religious environment, while the rights of the individual should still be preserved.

It would take us too far from our immediate subject to enter upon the consideration of tendencies in philosophy and political theory which have prevailed since the Reformation. We may, however, say shortly that the individualistic theology of Lutheranism finds support in much of the speculation both in England and Germany. It is natural, therefore, that the Protestant German critic should approach the consideration of the New Testament with presuppositions of this kind, and few if any of them have escaped this. He naturally looks to the Bible as his religious authority, and he naturally expects to find in it confirmation of the religious ideas in which he has been brought up.

I venture to think that from the point of view of sound criticism this has been a real disaster. Neither the New Testament itself taken as a whole, nor the history of the

Church previous to the Reformation period, clearly supports individualism. Certain passages, taken in isolation from our Lord's discourses or the writings of S. Paul, may appear to bear this interpretation, but the evidence as a whole does not. The spiritual Christian Society, visible and invisible, takes the place of the ancient covenant people. Those who have gone as individualists, with the modern critical spirit, to recreate and make vivid the spirit of the New Testament, have found difficulty in making the New Testament express the view of Christianity which individualism requires. They have been troubled by the presence of definite and somewhat elaborate doctrine both about God and Christ, and the Sacraments, and there has been also the very vigorous seed of the doctrine of the Catholic Church. If it be granted that doctrine, sacraments, and Church are secondary elements in Christianity and require to be explained out of some simpler stage of things, the New Testament must be reconstructed: these elements must be dissociated, as far as possible, from our Lord and His immediate followers, and a view of the New Testament must be adopted which will

show how the "accretions" gradually developed out of the "primitive Gospel." I do not say that the critics deliberately set themselves to force the New Testament into an unnatural mould: this would make them out dishonest men; but it is undeniable that the individualistic view of Christianity prevails in German Protestantism, and that the New Testament requires some considerable remodelling if it is to speak in these tones and these only or primarily. This view is borne out by the distribution of critical tendencies in England. On the whole the disposition to accept German conclusions is stronger in the more individualistic bodies than in the Church of England. It is natural that it should be so. The Church of England has never committed itself to the individualistic point of view, and has therefore never approached its problems under this preconception. It has therefore preserved a greater freedom in dealing with the New Testament to include tendencies of thought in the New Testament which, if isolated from one another, may easily seem contradictory.

II. These points, the supernatural and the Church, seem to me to affect a considerable

area of critical discussion. I think also that the method employed in criticizing the New Testament is open to some important objections. You know, of course, that it has become the common practice now to search for the explanation of things in terms of gradual evolution. Darwin proposed to substitute the idea of gradual process of change for that of sudden and special creation as an explanation of the various species of animals now inhabiting the globe. There is no doubt possible any longer of the value and fruitfulness of this way of looking at things; and it is not surprising that it was soon extended to all sorts of subjects outside the mere physical order of species—to human institutions, moral, political, and religious. One of the obvious results of the use of this principle is a dislike to sharp distinctions and a desire to fill up the gaps between two different stages in the same line of development with intervening degrees. It has to be remembered that it has never proved possible to carry out in detail the theoretical principle of evolution, even in the physical world. It has never been found possible to show the whole order of living beings as a single process of growth

in which each distinguishable species has its place. The theory of evolution is an ideal of scientific thought and not demonstrated history. And there are certain dangers in the application of it which, if not provided against, are liable to lead to confusion. It is, for instance, a mistake to suppose that by accepting the theory of evolution the actual differences between things are got rid of. If it should be true, for instance, that the human species came into existence by means of a number of intermediary changes from the species of apes, this leaves the difference between apes and men exactly where it was. No particular ape ever turned into a particular man; if there were intermediary changes, it means that there were creatures better than the best modern apes and worse than the worst modern men before the gap between the average existing ape and the average existing man was covered. These are as far apart as if they had been made separately; the intervening stages are, as it were, separate points on a continuous line, stations on a continuous journey, and however many there are of them they are nothing more than this. Closely akin to the neglect of this fact, is the

tendency to construe the process of evolution from the beginning rather than the end. This is really contrary to the whole meaning of evolution. What makes a small variation or change an evolutionary variation is that it is a step forward to some end: it is the end that explains the process and makes it intelligible. It is therefore a mistake to suppose that the evolution theory, if true, degrades the more advanced stages to the level of the earlier ones. Man is not a mere decorated ape; the ape, if the two species are connected by evolution, is an undecorated, undeveloped man.

These two points are of importance even in regard to physical evolution; they are much more vital when the formula is applied to institutions and ideas. It is always impossible to explain a great moment or stage in human development out of pre-existing conditions, however closely they may be related to it; and it is always the great moment or stage which illuminates and explains the earlier stages, and not otherwise. This is true in other things as well as religion. It is impossible to explain away real discontinuities in history. Looking back, we may

see how the change was gradually prepared ; but the new stage is always more than the sum of its antecedents.

There has been much energy spent of late years in the wholly legitimate endeavours to make the historical conditions in which our Lord lived and taught real and vivid. The books and ideas which belong to the close of the Jewish period have been closely scrutinized and their traces searched out in the Gospels. It has been possible by this means to understand better than before how our Lord may have impressed His contemporaries. But He, at the very lowest estimate, represents a fundamental breach with all past religious history. All the previous conditions put together do not account for Him : their relation to Him gives them all the interest and importance that they have or can ever have. To forget this is to misuse the principle of evolution, and to ensure inadequate and erroneous conclusions. It appears to me that this misuse of a good principle is an error into which critical reconstructions of the Gospel have not infrequently fallen.

A second point of deep importance is closely connected with this question of

scientific method. If we are really to reconstruct the history as it appeared to contemporary eyes, it is indispensable that we should keep steadily in view the environment in which it all took place. No one denies this in theory ; it is indeed the main purpose and spirit of scientific criticism to carry out the principle in practice. But there are many pitfalls in the way of the scientific historian, and I venture to think that many have met with accidents. There is one point of difference between the New Testament books and most other literature which must always affect our judgment of it. They were written and published for a definite public, in connexion with an active practical organization. The majority of the letters of S. Paul are addressed to Churches, not to individuals ; S. Luke's Gospel and the Acts are inscribed to Theophilus, of whom nothing is known ; the Third Epistle of S. John is addressed to the beloved Gaius. The Gospels of S. Matthew and S. Mark have no address. All the other books definitely presuppose an active Church. All are occasional writings : that is, they arise out of circumstances which would be before the minds of

those to whom they first came; and their full and proper meaning will be attained so far as we may be able to disinter the occasion from the text, or to supply corroborative information. This is, I think, a point of importance in which New Testament differs considerably from other literature. A history or poem always appeals to readers of some kind, but it usually appeals to them as individuals and not otherwise. Thucydides appeals to Greek readers who are interested in history: that is the link between the author and the readers—a common interest in a particular subject. There is not necessarily or usually an organized body of persons to whom the work is addressed. The New Testament differs from other books exactly in this point. Yet it not uncommonly happens that the books and the New Testament as a whole are treated in isolation, without a sufficient recognition of their bearing on the living Church, and the Church on them. But it was because the Church read them and found in them a distinctive character, which separated them from other books at first sight resembling them, that they were collected together in the form in which we now

have them. The Church was an active body with a mind of its own. Its literature is scanty in the period immediately after Apostolic times, and it is easy to forget its continuous and effective existence. I will mention one conspicuous illustration of this. The Bishop of Lyons, Irenæus, who was living about 180 A.D., was convinced that the Fourth Gospel was written by John, the disciple who leaned back on to Jesus' breast at the Supper (*Adv. Hær.*, III. i.). According to the tradition, which Irenæus knew and accepted, this disciple died at Ephesus late in the first century. It rarely happens that we know the links which connect a subsequent writer like Irenæus with the author of a book written a considerable time before. But in this case we do know that Irenæus derived his information from an actual pupil and follower of John. If Irenæus and Polycarp were persons of whom we knew nothing but the fact that they ascribed a particular book to a particular person, it would be possible to put a small value upon their statements. But they were prominent people holding prominent office in a body which was continuous throughout the whole period: which had already considered

and settled a variety of questions, and was vitally interested in preserving its tradition unimpaired. It has been suggested that there was a confusion as to the John who was meant ; but it is hard to believe that Polycarp was in any doubt as to the John he knew, or that Irenæus was uncertain whether he meant John the Apostle or some one else, or that the Church so near the time had got into confusion on the subject. Irenæus nowhere says in so many words, " This John who wrote the Gospel was son of Zebedee." But the passage above mentioned clearly treats him as one of the Twelve. Its purpose is to connect the Four Gospels with the Apostles. So he connects Mark with Peter and Luke with Paul ; the names of Matthew and John speak for themselves.

It would be possible to develop this point at great length, but for this we have not now the time. I would only urge that the Church for which the New Testament books were written, by which they were accepted and gradually treated on an equality with the Old Testament Scriptures, throws more trustworthy light upon the purpose and character of our Lord's Life than any analysis of previous

movements in Judaism ; and that it is impossible out of these earlier elements to build up securely a picture of what Christ intended, or to explain the results of His activity. And it may be added that there is no condemnation of a historical reconstruction so damaging as to say that it fails to explain what has actually come out of the conditions. Some rather popular reconstructions of the Gospels and early history of the Church seem to me to fall under this condemnation.

It is contended, then, not that the books of the New Testament should be withdrawn from critical discussion, but that their character and circumstances should be fully taken into account in dealing with them. The miraculous element in them needs very careful examination, but it is not rightly excluded, apart from a clear recognition of the subject-matter of the books. The relation of the individual to the Christian Society, if it is to be rightly determined, must be considered apart from the influence on this side or on that of Reformation controversy. If, then, we are confronted with very drastic reconstructions of the books themselves, or a serious

remodelling of the strongly evidenced traditions about them, and the like, we are entitled to ask how far such reconstruction has been rendered necessary by the assumption that the miraculous must at all costs be cut out, or by the effort to explain away the real chasm which separates Christ from the old order, or by the desire to reduce the Christian Society to a secondary and incidental position. The presence of any one of these motives must render us highly suspicious of the results to which it may lead.

IV

I MUST now try to draw together the various lines of thought which have occupied us on these four evenings, and I think I can do this best by setting out summarily what I think is the main character and purpose of the Bible. The Bible is primarily a *record*, and that is, in my view, its essential characteristic. It records the action of God in the manifestation of Himself, first through the Jewish nation, and then, for all the world, in the Church. There are many other things in it, some of them highly important for various reasons, and some less so. But the main interest of it is to say authoritatively what God has done, and to give us some indications of what He may be expected to do. It is a continuous story; we are taken through the whole series of decisive actions from the call of Abraham to the Coming of Christ. And it is not only continuous within itself: it is continuous also with our daily experience. We live from the religious side in close connexion with it; our

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religion is what it is because of the Bible ; we belong to the line that began with Abraham. We have learnt of recent years to understand more accurately how this continual purpose worked through the complex web of ancient history ; we have come to realize the character of other religions and their relation to that displayed in the Bible. And we can trace back securely, till it gets lost in the mists of tradition, the consciousness in one nation that God had interested Himself in men, and aimed at making Himself known. This desire for intercourse with man is the motive of all that we call revelation, and of course it shows itself in many forms. The true happiness of man lies in a life in union with God, and this has meant the worship of Jehovah instead of all kinds of more attractive and less exacting forms of religion. It has meant sacrifice and the law, the worship of synagogue and temple. In present conditions it means spiritual union with God in the Body of Christ, which the Spirit sustains and keeps alive.

Further, the whole of this continuous process is carried on through ordinary history in the ordinary world. The Jew is not

expected to give up the normal interests of men, but he is expected to give them a particular colour: to follow them under certain rules and restrictions, which emphasize his distinctness from the Gentiles and his adhesion to Jehovah. In some sense, though the occasions of the assertion of the claim are not frequent, his religion lays its hand upon his whole life and gives it unity. Religion is not to be a casual element in a life which is predominantly non-religious; it is to govern the policy of the nation, as well as the course of private life. For it is with the nation—that is, with the whole normal environment of the man—that God deals: man is a social being. So again the new order claims the whole life and deals with men in the whole of their normal social environment. The physical succession from Abraham, which appeared final to the Jews of our Lord's time, and concealed from them their responsibilities for the world as a whole, passes away, and there is substituted for it the Body of Christ, the members held together by spiritual union to their Head. This Body again moves and acts in the ordinary world. It does not necessarily put an end to such a condition

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as that of the slave. It has gifts enabling it to deal with the problems which its presence in the world creates, and it looks forward to a return of the Lord in power. Social virtue comes because we are members of Christ, because our bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost, because we strive to follow where our great Leader pointed the way. The old religion laid its hand upon all the life of the chosen people : the new claims no less of all who belong to it. It promises communion with God—certain and assured in this life, and afterwards a glorious resurrection into life everlasting.

The continuous self-revelation of God in history, leading up to, and again flowing out from, the manifestation of the Son of God in flesh is the burden of the Bible—the single idea which holds it all together, and justifies our continuing to use it as the rule of faith. The central events in it are the Death upon the Cross, and the Resurrection—the Death because in this are seen the holiness and the love of God, the Resurrection because in it is seen His power to triumph over all the evil in the world, to rescue man from sin and carry out His purpose of winning the love of

man. Thus the Bible still has claims upon us as a whole. This does not mean that every book and every line is equally binding in its literal sense: still less does it mean that the literal sense is unimportant provided we can, by hook or crook, extract some edifying interpretation from it. The Bible shows us God in action, and the more surely we can find out what exactly He did, the more clearly we can understand His action with the chosen people and the Church in relation to the general history of the world, the better we shall understand what the Bible is to teach us. The Bible introduces us to a system of Divine government: it shows us the world as a spiritual order, and explains what happens there on spiritual principles. It tells us, for instance, of the fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and exhibits the spiritual cause of it. When the time comes it shows us the nature of the Kingdom that will replace the earthly Kingdom of David, and declares the principles which will regulate its laws. It never recoils from the ordinary world, or denies its evil: it always affirms that God who sits on high is mightier than all the forces ranged against Him, and that He

has vindicated His power in the manifestation of His Son.

This concreteness and continuity of system is the cause both of the success of the Bible and its liability to easy and cheap attack. We have in it, as I have said, an order like the order of nature: we learn in it what God has done, and we verify what we learn in it in our own experience of to-day. If it is said, as it often is, that it is impossible to prove the existence of Abraham, that he is a saga-hero—a phrase carrying much consolation—we cannot but admit that you cannot *prove* his existence, any more than you can prove the existence of any person who from the antiquity of his date or other causes has deficient connexions with other history. Yet the Abraham-saga, if that name be preferred, belongs to a continuous tradition which passes through centuries of verifiable history and ends in the verifiable religious experiences of the Church to-day. In Aristotelian phrase, the whole is prior to the part. We are not called upon to put together our whole religious system out of painfully collected conclusions in various special fields: we are confronted with a systematic whole,

which meets us as the outer world meets our senses, and we cannot claim to make our uncertainty on the fringe of it the test of its total reality and validity.

But the line of attack upon the Bible is not confined to points of history and other details : difficulties are also felt on more general grounds. I will mention two. There is the question of evil. This has not unnaturally been the source of long and painful questioning. It is hard to understand its presence in the world, and the relation of it to pain. If pain and misfortune came only upon the wicked the situation would be somewhat easier to understand : but they come upon all alike, the just and the unjust. Now it is possible to try to build up a theoretical explanation of the world which starts from this fact, and is mainly interested in the explanation of it, and some of these schemes have been very popular. They vary a good deal in outward expression, but there is a family likeness among them. They account for the presence of evil out of the fact of finite existence : either by saying that the spiritual substance which is essentially good, is imprisoned in matter which is evil : that is the

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Manichæan solution: or by saying that evil is inherent in finite desire: that is the Buddhist solution: or by saying that evil and pain are delusion and unreal, which is the solution offered by Christian Science. All these involve a repudiation of the world of experience and fact: the ordinary world in which we live. And just for that reason—though they have an attractive appearance of symmetry and completeness—they are useless. The Bible, on the other hand, confronts us with a system based on the ordinary world, but not confined to it. The ordinary world is within a great spiritual order, beginning before it, and extending after it: we cannot hope, therefore, to find a solution that will satisfy all questions arising within it without reference to this spiritual order. The Bible does not discuss the origin of evil at any length: it does not pretend that it is anything but evil, or deny the reality of pain. But it tells us that God in Christ, crucified and risen, has overcome it, and promises that we shall verify this in our own natural experience here and hereafter. However black things may look to a narrow and non-spiritual point of view, God does know what He is

doing and really governs the world in righteousness. But it offers no solution apart from the manifestation of God in Christ. Again, closely connected with this question of pain and evil is the difficulty of sin and judgment. The Bible represents God not only as loving, but also as holy with a stern hatred of sin: and it treats sin as open to Divine judgment, and needing some atoning process to clear it away. The natural man objects to the whole of this position. He does not like to admit himself guilty of wrong-doing: he will admit mistakes and imperfect knowledge, and venial failures of various kinds: but he does not like to think that there is an impassable gulf between good and evil, and that he may find himself abiding on the wrong side. He would like to be able to cross and recross at will. But he is not facing the facts: he is dealing not with the whole order in which he lives, but with a narrow and superficial aspect of it only; he cannot see, therefore, why the Cross should ever have been necessary. But it is in the light of the Cross that the real meaning of ordinary life is plain, and the real significance of the action of the will.

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I urge then that if we want to know really the truth about our ordinary life we must go to the Bible: and go to it with a genuine readiness to treat it as a whole, and be guided by its teaching. Its value is not that it provides a solution of the problem of pain, with which we may happen to be concerned at some particular time, but that it places our life as a whole in relation with the whole spiritual order, and deals with all parts and aspects of our experience. We shall be perplexed by it sometimes. It will provide problems for the intellect, the conscience, and the feelings. We shall find it hard, for instance, to reconcile the idea of judgment with the gospel of love: this question taxes the powers of all three. Then we shall be tempted to apply fallaciously the idea of evolution or adopt some theory of varied and incompatible sources. We shall be tempted to say that evil is merely an earlier stage in a progress: or the mistake of a well-meaning but uninstructed will. But if we go without prepossessions we shall find the unity in the Bible much more real and concrete than any we can devise for ourselves, and much more fully adequate to the problems of our life.

The theories which men set against the teaching of the Bible are based on the requirements of the intellect *alone*, or the conscience *alone* at a particular stage of its development, or current sentiments and emotions. All these give us an incomplete and fallible view of the world, as we said at the start. The Bible shows us the world in motion in all its fullness as the manifestation of God, and shows us how we may correct the imperfections of the intellect, the will, and the emotions, and reach the reality of things.

But it is essential that if we are to use the Bible profitably we should endeavour to find out *exactly* what it says. Much of the difficulty about it arises from the fact that it is more inaccurately quoted than any book in the world: and there is a strong, but, as I think, a wholly delusive conviction that it is not intended to teach us positive religious truth. The natural man is terrified at the very name of dogma. Yet dogma is merely clear and accurate thinking. No doubt dogma has been misused, and there are wrong ways as well as right ways of asserting it. But religion is not merely instinct or sentiment: distinction of true and false is real

and is applicable to religion, and a religion which ignores truth and precision of statement is of a lower type than religion expressed in a creed: just as the instinctive proceedings of bees, however practically efficient, are of a lower type than the rational activities of man.

Lastly, we must go to the Bible with prayer. For in prayer we come nearest to the spirit in which the books were written, and to the central motive force of the whole spiritual order which the Bible displays. The interpretation of it is not merely a matter of scholarship, though there is no complete way of dealing with the Bible without scholarship. It is necessary, in order to understand it, to be in a frame of mind similar to that of the authors, and to understand the subject of which they wrote. Knowledge of what other men have said and thought about the Bible helps in this direction. But it is, after all, as we have said, a record of the action of God in history and of His self-manifestation to men; and we come to understand this aspect of it best by means of prayer. For it is in prayer that we ourselves attain in experience some of that intercourse with God

upon which the whole Bible hangs. We find that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, and that through this we are able to deal with the problems which press upon us in the world.

THE END



Strong, T.B.

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